DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 359 718 EC 302 280

AUTHOR Siegel, Janna
TITLE Teachers' Attitudes toward Their Integrated Learning Handicapped Students: Relationship to Teacher Perceptions of Students' Behavior.
PUB DATE [92]
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary School Teachers; Intermediate Grades; Labeling (of Persons); *Learning Disabilities; Mainstreaming; *Mild Mental Retardation; Perception; *Student Behavior; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Behavior

ABSTRACT

Teachers' perceptions of student behaviors were examined to explain teachers' attitudes toward their students with and without learning handicaps. The study involved 44 intermediate-grade teachers who had students with learning handicaps and nonhandicapped students in their classrooms. Teachers' attitudes were measured with a four-question survey, and their perceptions of students' behavior, achievement, and personality were obtained through use of the Teachable Pupil Survey. Results indicated that students whom teachers perceived as exhibiting less ideal student behaviors were more likely to be rejected by teachers, without regard to disabilities. Findings imply that the handicapped label does not influence teachers' attitudes as much as the teachers' perceptions of the students' behaviors do. (Contains 28 references.) (JDD)

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ED359718

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THEIR INTEGRATED LEARNING HANDICAPPED STUDENTS : RELATIONSHIP TO TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS' BEHAVIOR

Janna Siegel, Ph.D

Assistant Professor, Special Education

Eastern New Mexico University, Station 25

Portales, New Mexico, United States of America

Phone: (505) 562-2603 fax: (505) 562-2523

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Teachers' Attitudes Toward Their Learning Handicapped Students : Relationship to Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Behaviors

Abstract

In this study, teachers' perceptions of student behaviors are examined to explain the teachers' attitudes toward their students with learning handicaps and non handicapped students. The results indicate that students whom teachers perceived as exhibiting less ideal student behaviors were more likely to be rejected by teachers, without regard to handicaps. These finding imply that the handicapping label does not influence teachers behaviors as much as the teachers' perceptions of the students' behaviors. The author discusses implications for special education and teacher training.

In the current climate of "inclusion", American schools are placing increasing numbers of learning disabled, behavior disordered, and mildly mentally retarded students into regular classes. These students are said to be mainstreamed or "integrated"* and in California students with these types of disabilities are labeled "learning handicapped". Previous studies have shown that teachers hold negative attitudes toward integrated students. (Blazovic, 1972; Childs, 1979; Conine, 1969; DeLeo, 1976; Garvar-Pinhas & Schmelkin, 1989; Horne, 1983; Moore & Fine, 1978; Parish, Dyck & Kappes, 1977; Sigler & Lazar, 1976; Skrtic et al., 1975; Vacc & Kirst, 1977). These studies used vignettes or general questions rather than real integrated students with learning handicaps (SLH) when investigating teachers' attitudes. The researchers assumed that teachers with negative attitudes toward inclusion would reject their handicapped students.

Siegel (1992a &1992b) explored teachers' attitudes toward their actual integrated SLH. In these studies, a sample of forty-four fourth through sixth grade teachers completed attitude questionnaires about selected SLH and non-learning handicapped students in their classrooms. The results demonstrated that teachers had more rejecting attitudes toward their students who received special education services than toward their non-handicapped students, as has been documented by previous research studies. However, teachers were overwhelmingly concerned for their handicapped students. None of the previous studies asked teachers about their attitudes of concern for SLH. The general questions devised by researchers such as Childs (1979), Parish et al. (1979), and Leary (1957) forced teachers to choose pro or con regarding inclusion, and did not take into account other kinds of attitudes that teachers may have held. The regular education

*Although they describe the same concepts, the terms integration, integrated and inclusion are now replacing the traditional terms of mainstreaming, mainstreamed and mainstream.

teachers' apparent concern offers hope that they would not mind working with special needs students if they had the skills and knowledge to do so successfully. Teachers' successes with the actual students was significantly correlated with positive teachers' attitudes.

One of the more striking results of this study was that there was no relationship between teachers' general attitudes toward integrating SLH and their attitudes toward the integrated SLH in their classrooms. This result gives reason to question some of the interpretations made by previous researchers who have explored teachers' attitudes toward students with handicaps (Jones, 1984).

Methods

This study is an extension of the previously mentioned study by Siegel (1992a &1992b). In this study, not only were teachers' attitudes toward the SLH and their non handicapped students in their classrooms assessed, but also the teachers' perceptions of their students' behaviors. Several studies have mentioned that teachers' hold negative attitudes toward students who do not have ideal school behaviors (Algozzine, 1976). In this part of the study, it was hypothesized that teachers' perceptions of students' behaviors would relate to the teachers' attitudes toward their students, both SLH and nonhandicapped. The subjects, procedures, instruments, hypotheses and analyses are described in the following section.

Subjects

Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade teachers (n=44) who taught at the elementary schools in two districts participated in the study. All the consenting teachers with integrated SLH in their classrooms were included in the study; only five of the available teachers declined to participate in the study. The districts were similar in the educational background of the teachers and the percentage of teachers who taught fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. The

average class size was around 30 for both school districts. District 1 had fewer male teachers than District 2. District 1 also had more White teachers than Black, while District 2 had equal proportions of White to Black teachers. The breakdown of the subjects' gender, race, education, grade level, class size and teaching experience in the study is presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Procedures

First, each teacher's class had a sample group of SLH and their non handicapped peers chosen from the total class roster. The selection was completed by the investigator for each class before the surveys were given to the participating teachers. The sample included all integrated SLH and a comparison group of non handicapped students. The number of non handicapped students in the sample was the number of SLH in the class plus two. This formula was devised to provide enough non handicapped students into the sample to be representative of the teacher's entire class. The formula also provided enough students so that it was not apparent that SLH were the focus of the study, but not so many that the teachers could not fill out surveys in a timely way.

Students selected for the non learning handicapped control group were chosen as representatives of class demographics. The variables that were controlled were: gender, race, and student achievement. The non handicapped students were selected by their characteristics as representative students in the areas of gender, ethnicity, and grades for each class. All non handicapped student samples included male and female, high, average,

and low achieving students, and represented the major ethnic groups found in the particular classroom.

The teachers were told that this was a study of teachers' perceptions. They were not informed that their attitudes toward the integrated SLH in their classrooms was the focus of the study. The teachers were asked to complete Teacher Attitude Surveys and Teachable Pupil Surveys.

Teacher Attitude Survey. Teachers' attitudes were assessed with four questions that addressed attitudes of acceptance, indifference, concern, and rejection toward each student in the sample (adapted from Silberman, 1969); the ratings were on a 6 point Likert-type scale:

1. Attachment: If you could choose a child to stay in your classroom another year for the sheer joy of it, is it likely you would choose this child?

Not likely 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very likely

2. Indifference: If this child's parent or guardian dropped in unannounced for a conference, how much would you have to say about this child?

Little to say 1 2 3 4 5 6 A lot to say

3. Concern: If you could devote all your attention to a child who concerns you a great deal, is it likely you would choose this child?

Not likely 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very likely

4. Rejection: If your class size was reduced by a child, how relieved would you be if this child was transferred?

Not relieved 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very relieved

Teachable Pupil Survey. Student factors that have demonstrated significant effects on teachers' attitudes toward students include student behavior, achievement, personality, and gender. Teachers' perceptions of students' behavior, achievement and personality were obtained through use of the Teachable Pupil Survey (Kornblau, 1979) that asks teachers to rate students on three dimensions to determine the "teachability" of the student. It was believed that the Teachable Pupil Survey (TPS) could give added information as to why teachers may hold the attitudes they do toward their students. The TPS was filled out for each student in the sample. The survey, which was developed to describe the behaviors of idealized teachable pupils, consists of 33 descriptors of different aspects of pupils' classroom behavior. For each descriptor, the teachers assigned a rating on a 6-point, Likert-type scale that most closely reflected their opinion of the pupil (1 = not at all characteristic of the pupil, 6 = almost always characteristic of pupil). Factor analysis of these items has revealed that they cluster along the dimensions of cognitive-motivational behaviors, school-appropriate behaviors, and personal-social behaviors (Kornblau, 1979). Dimension scores were obtained by computing a mean rating for each pupil for each of the three dimensions. The three dimensions are Dimension X: Cognitive-Motivational Behaviors, Dimension Y: School-Appropriate Behaviors, and Dimension Z: Personal-Social Behaviors (Table 2). These dimensions have descriptors that incorporate the three student factors (behavior, achievement and personality), which attitude research has found significant.

Insert Table 2 about here

Results

The relationship between teachers' attitudes toward their students and the teachers' perceptions of these students' behaviors was measured using the TPS for each student. The TPS has 3 dimension subscores and a total score that were averaged from 33 items that contain a 1-6 Likert-type scale. The scores for Dimension X: Cognitive-Motivational Behaviors, Dimension Y: School-Appropriate Behaviors, and Dimension Z: Personal-Social Behaviors were compared to the Teacher Attitude Survey (TAS) ratings. Table 3 contains correlation results between teachers' attitudes and perceived student behaviors.

Insert Table 3 about here

The TPS and the TAS were significantly and moderately related for three attitudes. Attachment was positively correlated with the total TPS score and Dimensions X, Y, and Z. Rejection was negatively correlated with the total TPS score and Dimensions X, Y, and Z. Also, concern had a low negative correlation to the TPS scores. Correlations were computed to determine if these relationship patterns were different for SLH versus non handicapped students. Table 4 shows the results for both groups. Differences were found, especially for the concern attitude which did not demonstrate significant correlations for LH. But overall, there were no differences between SLH and non handicapped results for attachment (which were both positively correlated to the TPS), and rejection (which were both negatively correlated to the TPS scores).

Insert Table 4 about here

Discussion

Although teachers generally harbored some negative views toward the integrated learning handicapped students in their classrooms, the evidence from this study indicated that a rejecting attitude toward specific SLH was related to teachers' perceptions of the students' behaviors. A major contribution to teachers' attitudes and behaviors toward their students, whether learning handicapped or not, was the teachers' perception of the students' behaviors in school. These results illustrate the need to train learning handicapped students to use appropriate student behaviors before placing them into a integrated situation. Integrated students who do not possess appropriate student behaviors and social skills are destined to become the students most rejected by their classroom teachers.

Ever since Rosenthal and Jacobson's Pygmalian in the Classroom (1968), researchers and educators have been clamoring about the effects of labels and teacher expectations. Other researchers have done thorough investigations of teacher expectancy effects and have found that these expectations are usually based on realistic information rather than biased material (Jussim, 1989). The results from this study indicate that the label a student is given is much less predictive of teachers' attitudes than the teachers' perceptions of the students' behaviors. Teachers held rejecting attitudes to less ideal pupils regardless of whether the student had a handicapping label or not.

Both regular and special education teachers agree that nonacademic skills are important for successful inclusion, but most studies indicate that these school skills are rarely used to make integration decisions (Hundert, 1982). Often students who demonstrate appropriate student behaviors in the resource room do not behave appropriately in regular education settings, where different behaviors are required (Cruickshank, 1985). Therefore, special education teachers need to focus as much on

nonacademic skills when working with SLH as they do on academic concerns. It is the school appropriate behaviors and personal-social skills expected of non-handicapped students that may determine whether or not SLH experience acceptance or rejection in the regular classroom. The fact that teachers were rejecting of students who displayed inappropriate school behaviors also indicates the need for more training in management skills for regular education teachers, to help them deal with students with behavioral, organizational, or attentional problems.

Based on previous research, many teacher trainers have placed great emphasis on changing regular teachers' attitudes toward integrating handicapped students (Donaldson, 1980; Gallagher, 1985; Hudson, Reisberg & Wolf, 1983; Shechtman, 1989). Ryor (1977), ex-president of the National Education Association, stated that the intent of PL 94-142 would be destroyed if teachers did not have positive attitudes toward integrating handicapped students. Although it is agreed that regular education teachers' attitudes are important, the results from this study suggests that changing teachers' general attitudes may not necessarily change teachers' attitudes or their ability to cope with their actual integrated students.

The results of this study are an important addition to our understanding about integrating learning handicapped students. This study suggests that teachers' abilities to cope with student behaviors were the major contributing factors to successful integration experiences for the students and teachers involved. This researcher believes that educators can successfully integrate learning handicapped students, but only if the school system is willing to adapt for inclusion. This can be accomplished by training regular teachers to work with SLH and educating the SLH to better handle the regular education setting.

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Table 1

Subject Characteristics

		District 1 n = 18 n/%	District 2 n = 26 n/%	Total N = 44 n/%
GENDER	Male	3/17	7/26	10/23
	Female	15/83	19/73	34/77
RACE	Black	2/11	12/46	14/32
	White	15/83	12/46	27/61
	Hispanic	0	1/4	1/2
	Asian	1/6	1/4	2/5
EDUCATION	BA/BS	14/78	19/73	33/75
	MA/MS	4/22	7/27	11/25
GRADE	4th	6/33	9/35	15/34
	5th	5.5/30	9/35	14.5/33
	6th	6.5/37	8/30	14.5/33
CLASS SIZE	Av. size	30.1	30.5	30.3
	Range	26-33	26-33	26-33
EXPERIENCE	Av. years	12.5	7.6	9.6
	Range	3-33	1-29	1-31

Table 2

Descriptors and Dimensions in Teachable Pupil Survey (Kornblau, 1982. p. 172)

Dimension X: Cognitive-Motivational Behaviors
bright
clear-thinking, logical, rational
curious, inquisitive, questioning
enterprising, inventive in thinking
high verbal ability
intelligent
imaginative, uses materials in an original manner
insightful, perceptive
Dimension Y: School-Appropriate Behaviors
able to begin and complete classroom tasks
academic achievement appropriate for age and grade
alert, attentive to classroom proceedings
attention span appropriate for age and grade
completes work on time
eager, enthusiastic about classroom activities
enjoys school work
follows directions
willingly participates in classroom activities
Dimension Z: Personal-Social Behaviors
calm
confident
considerate of others
emotionally stable
empathetic, understanding of feelings of others
extroverted, outgoing
friendly
happy, cheerful
has sense of humor
honest
pleasant, good-natured
sincere
socially well-adjusted
well-accepted and liked by peers
Miscellaneous
cooperative
adaptable to changing classroom routine

Table 3

Teachers' Attitude Survey Correlations With Teachable Pupil Survey

	Xav	Yav	Zav	Tot
Att	.52*	.62*	.65*	.66*
Ind	-.11	-.11	.02	.02
Con	-.32*	-.40*	-.21*	-.33*
Rej	-.44*	-.58*	-.61*	-.61*

N = 262 * $p < .01$

Att - attachment, Ind - indifference, Con - concern, Rej - rejection
Xav, Yav, Zav- Dimension X, Y, Z averages Tot - Total TPS score average

Table 4

Teachers' Attitude Survey Correlations With Teachable Pupil Survey

Students With Learning Handicaps: N=87

	Xav	Yav	Zav	Tot
Att	.35*	.62*	.55*	.61*
Ind	-.07	.24	.04	.09
Con	.13	.09	.26	.20
Rej	-.34*	-.65*	-.57*	-.63*

Non-Learning Handicapped Students: N=175

Att	.54*	.60*	.66*	.66*
Ind	-.14	.07	.01	-.01
Con	-.32*	-.43*	-.29*	-.37*
Rej	-.42*	-.51*	-.60*	-.57*

* $p < .01$

Att - attachment, Ind - indifference, Con - concern, Rej - rejection
Xav, Yav, Zav- Dimension X, Y, Z averages Tot - Total TPS score average